

When it came time for Mayra to attend college, her mother struggled to find the resources to help pay for her tuition.

But because of DACA, Mayra was able to attend and pay for college, and eventually graduated from California State University Dominguez Hills, with a degree in Business Administration.

With her degree in hand, Mayra was able to pursue her dream of working in content creation, while also having peace in knowing that DACA would protect her against deportation.

In 2017, Mayra unfortunately lost her father, who lived in Mexico.

After a 3 year-long battle, she obtained Advance Parole, and received a travel permit to visit Mexico, to finally visit her father's grave and mourn his passing in-person.

This was the first time in 20 years that Mayra was able to return to Mexico.

Mayra's talent continued to shine through, and her persistence and resilience paid off.

With the help of Advanced Parole, she was able to further her career as a content creator, by seeking life changing job opportunities.

She was able to travel and work in London and other places, where she did content creation for films that were eventually nominated for awards at film festivals.

Mayra now works for the Long Beach Immigration Rights Coalition.

Recently, while taking photos of graduates of the Coalition's Leadership Academy Program, she met and was moved by the story of another young DACA recipient.

Mayra understood their struggle, and realized that she shared a common bond.

Mayra's job has given her the opportunity to capture the stories of those who have struggled to be an immigrant in this country. It has allowed her to change the all-too-common narrative about immigrants, to one that depicts immigrants as resilient and capable of moving forward in difficult situations.

When Mayra returned to the U.S. from her visit to Mexico and Europe, she was met with two signs each time.

One said U.S. citizens to the right and the other, non-citizens to the left.

When Mayra encountered these signs, she said to herself:

I know I have a permit to re-enter the country, but my reentry is not guaranteed.

I begin to pray to God hoping I say the right things, and that I don't face an officer who isn't going to know what advance parole is.

It's a feeling that is difficult to explain, you know you haven't done anything, yet you have to convince someone to let you into the country that you call your home."

Mayra is just one of many DREAMERS who have made incredible contributions to our nation.

She hopes that one day, she will be able to step to the right.

The time is now for my Republican colleagues and the Senate to pass legislation that will provide permanent protections for DACA recipients and DREAMERS in this country.

We can't wait any longer.

Because your home is here (Porque su hogar esta aqui). Forever (Para siempre).

HONORING MAJOR DREW DELA CRUZ UPON RECEIVING THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

HON. JOHN GARAMENDI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Mr. GARAMENDI. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor and commend Major Drew Dela Cruz of the 60th Air Mobility Wing upon receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service, dedication, and sacrifice during Operation Allies Refuge. He exemplifies the best of America, and his tireless efforts guarantee the safety of all those who call America home.

Last year, the servicemembers of the 60th Air Mobility Wing met a challenge of colossal scale when they played a pivotal role in completing the drawdown of forces from Afghanistan. This command was critical in the largest noncombatant evacuation operation in known history, Operation Allies Refuge, ultimately saving over 124,000 lives. The 60th Air Mobility Wing directly supported the evacuation of nearly 13,000 Afghans while simultaneously managing the security and operations at Hamid Karzai International Airport. I have listened to countless stories from this group of brave men and women that exemplify the character, leadership, and bravery that is cultivated at Travis Air Force Base.

Service records only scratch the surface of the courageous actions performed by the 60th Air Mobility Wing. They put their hearts and lives on the line to save so many. These valiant servicemembers like Major Drew Dela Cruz epitomize the values of courage and patriotism.

On behalf of a grateful country and all the constituents of California's Third Congressional District, I would like to congratulate Major Drew Dela Cruz of the 60th Air Mobility Wing for receiving the Distinguished Flying Cross and extend my sincere gratitude for his sacrifice and contributions to the defense of this great country.

HONORING U.S. NAVY AND MISSISSIPPI ARMY NATIONAL GUARD VETERAN JIMMY SPARKS

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the service of U.S. Navy and Mississippi Army National Guard Veteran Jimmy Sparks. Throughout his long and distinguished career in the military, Mr. Sparks devoted himself to serve our great Nation. Additionally, he is an outstanding volunteer driver for Lee County Veterans Services. He embodies all the characteristics that make us proud to be Americans.

On October 3, 1944, Mr. Sparks was born in Iuka. He was one of seven children who picked cotton to help support their family, who were sharecroppers. Eventually, the family moved to West Memphis, Arkansas, and Sallis, Mississippi.

In 1963, Mr. Sparks embarked on a new adventure by enlisting in the U.S. Navy. He was

assigned to the USS Midway (CVA-41), an aircraft carrier. The second aircraft carrier was the USS Coral Sea (CVA-43). Mr. Sparks was assigned to the fighter squadron on both aircraft carriers, serving as an aviation storekeeper. He said the first North Vietnamese MiG-17 to be shot down during the Vietnam War was by the Phantoms of Fighter Squadron 21 from the USS Midway carrier—on June 17, 1965.

In 1967, Mr. Sparks completed active duty and entered the U.S. Navy Reserve for one year. In 1974, Mr. Sparks joined the Mississippi Army National Guard, where he served with the 123rd Medivac. During his time with the Guard, his duties included maintaining armor and supply, driving a fuel truck, and motor maintenance. He retired as an E-7. Mr. Sparks served 31 years in the Mississippi Army National Guard. In later years, the 123rd Medivac changed to the 185th Aviation Battalion.

While serving in the Guard, Mr. Sparks worked for 21 years for Cooper Tire. In 2006, he retired. In 2007, Mr. Sparks learned there was a need for a driver to support services offered by the Lee County Veterans Services Officer. Soon thereafter, he became a volunteer driver. He was one of several volunteer drivers during that time who drove Veterans 1-3 times a week to the Memphis VA Medical Center.

Mr. Sparks has been recognized numerous times for his community service. In 2010, Mr. Sparks was recognized by the Lee County Board of Supervisors for his outstanding service for giving back to Veterans for what they have given to America. In 2015, Mr. Sparks received the "President's Lifetime Achievement Award" for his volunteer work. In 2020, Mr. Sparks was recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as the Memphis VA Medical Center Voluntary Services "2019-2020 Volunteer Driver of the Year".

To date, Mr. Sparks has devoted 7,500 hours to his fellow Veterans. He drives approximately 160 Veterans to and from Memphis over one year. Mr. Sparks has logged approximately 200,000 miles during his fifteen years of driving to the VA.

We are thankful for Mr. Sparks' service to America and for his steadfast devotion to the ensure Veterans have access to medical services. These men and women have earned and deserve the best available care. We wish the continued success of Mr. Sparks' volunteer work. Additionally, we want to recognize his wife, Nancy, and their children: Rusty Sparks (Beverly) and Jennifer (Terry) Merrell. Mr. and Mrs. Sparks have four grandchildren: Grace Sparks, Brenden Sparks, Kade (Cheyenne) Merrell, and Shelby (Marcus) Gray. The Lee County Sheriffs Department is commended for allowing the Lee County Veterans Services van to be safely parked and monitored at their Tupelo facility.

RECOGNIZING MRS. COLLEEN CURTIS

HON. DAVID G. VALADAO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Mr. VALADAO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mrs. Colleen Curtis on